

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2251
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SREF, RH, BC
SUBJ: VISIT TO ZIMBABWEAN REFUGEE CAMPS IN BOTSWANA

1. SUMMARY: EMBOFF VISITED FRANCISTOWN AND SELEBI-PIKWE REFUGEE CAMPS MAY 8-9 DURING TRIP TO NORTHERN BOTSWANA. ALTHOUGH ONSET OF COOL, DRY WEATHER HAS LED TO SOME IMPROVEMENT IN CAMP CONDITIONS, SERIOUS OVERCROWDING IN BOTH CAMPS THREATENS TO OVERWHELM UNHCR AND GOB RELIEF EFFORTS. TRANSFER OF REFUGEES TO NEW CAMP AT MOSETSE, WHICH IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN MID-MAY SHOULD PROVIDE SOME RELIEF, PARTICULARLY FOR FRANCISTOWN CAMP. SITHOLE SUPPORTERS WHO HAVE BEEN STRANDED FOR MONTHS IN SELEBI-PIKWE CAMP WERE RECENTLY REPATRIATED TO RHODESIA. JOSHUA NKOMO VISITED BOTH CAMPS MAY 8 AND RECEIVED EMOTIONAL BUT CONTROLLED WELCOME FROM REFUGEES. END SUMMARY.

2. WEIGHT OF NUMBERS: THE SHEER NUMBER OF ZIMBABWEAN REFUGEES WHICH MUST BE ACCOMMODATED IN FRANCISTOWN AND SELEBI-PIKWE REFUGEE CAMPS THREATENS TO OVERWHELM ALL RELIEF EFFORTS BY GOB AND UNHCR. THE PROBLEM IS PARTICULARLY SEVERE AT THE FRANCISTOWN CAMP WHERE RECENT CONSTRUCTION OF THREE NEW

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BARRACKS HAS ALREADY BEEN OUTSTRIPPED BY CAMP POPULATION SO LARGE THAT THERE IS LESS THAN ONE SQUARE METER OF SPACE PER REFUGEE WITHIN THE 3500 SQUARE METERS OF THE CAMP. THE VISITOR TO FRANCISTOWN CAMP IS IMMEDIATELY IMPRESSED BY THE MILLING CROWD OF REFUGEES SO NUMEROUS THAT EVEN STANDING ROOM SEEMS SCARCE INDEED. THE FOLLOWING CAMP POPULATION FIGURES FOR EARLY MAY INDICATE THE

EXTENT OF THE OVERCROWDING AT FRANCISTOWN:

	BOYS	GIRLS		
DATE	MEN UNDER 12	WOMEN UNDER 12	TOTAL	
MAY 1	2160	345	477	423 3405
MAY 2	2244	352	507	442 3545
MAY 3	2312	266	479	397 3454
MAY 4	2366	110	447	365 3288
MAY 5	2474	129	491	408 3502
MAY 6	2588	146	518	434 3688
MAY 7	2686	163	520	442 3811
MAY 8	2712	173	539	468 3892

3. CAMP POPULATION AT SELEBI-PIKWE IS CONSIDERABLY LARGER THAN AT FRANCISTOWN; A TOTAL OF 5011 REFUGEES WERE ACCOMMODATED THERE ON MAY 9. ACCORDING TO LWF ADMINISTRATOR AT SELEBI-PIKWE, DISTRIBUTION OF MINORS AND FEMALES IN HIS CAMP IS SIMILAR TO THAT WHICH EXISTS AT FRANCISTOWN. ALTHOUGH SELEBI-PIKWE CAMP HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO HANDLE MORE REFUGEES BECAUSE OF ITS BETTER LOCATION AND FACILITIES, IT IS ALSO OVERCROWDED AND APPROACHING ITS MAXIMUM CAPACITY. MOREOVER, REFUGEES CONTINUE TO ARRIVE AT RATE OF 100-200 EVERY DAY SWELLING BOTH CAMP POPULATIONS.

4. CAMP CONDITIONS: DESPITE THE OVERCROWDING, CONDITIONS IN BOTH CAMPS APPEAR TO HAVE IMPROVED SOMEWHAT SINCE OUR LAST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VISIT IN NOVEMBER 1977. THIS IMPROVEMENT IS LARGELY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE END OF RAINY SEASON WHICH HAD TURNED FRANCISTOWN CAMP INTO A PUTRESCENT GUAGMIRE. WITH ONSET OF COOL, DRY WEATHER, THREAT OF DISEASE HAS BEEN REDUCED, ALTHOUGH INADEQUATE WASTE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS IN BOTH CAMPS REPRESENT REAL HEALTH HAZARD. FOOD SUPPLIES IN BOTH CAMPS ARE ADEQUATE, AND REFUGEES CONTINUE TO RECEIVE ALL THE FOOD THEY CAN EAT. WORLD FOOD PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR HAS REQUESTED THAT REFUGEES BE PUT ON RATONS TO CONSERVE FOOD STOCKS BUT CAMP ADMINISTRATORS IN BOTH FRANCISTOWN AND SELEBI-PIKWE PREFER TO KEEP THEIR CHARGES SATISFIED BY GIVING THEM ALL THEY CAN EAT.

5. FLIGHTS TO ZAMBIA SUSPENDED: UNHCR-FUNDED AIRLIFT OF 3000 REFUGEES WAS COMPLETED DURING FIRST WEEK OF MAY. ACCORDING TO LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION (LWF) ADMINISTRATOR AT FRANCISTOWN, ONLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN WERE TRANSPORTED ON UNHCR FLIGHTS; ONLY EXCEPTION WAS 30 MALE TEACHERS WHO WERE TRANSPORTED BY SPECIAL REQUEST. NO NEW FLIGHTS HAVE YET BEEN SCHEDULED, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE OF FUNDING PROBLEMS AND RELUCTANCE OF ZAMBIAN AUTHORITIES TO PERMIT MORE REFUGEE FLIGHTS. LWF CAMP ADMINISTRATORS AT BOTH FRANCISTOWN AND SELEBI-PIKWE PREDICTED THAT REFUGEE POPULATION IN BOTSWANA WOULD REACH 20,000 WITHIN

A FEW MONTHS UNLESS MORE TRANSIT FLIGHTS CAN BE SCHEDULED.

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6. NEW CAMP AT MOSETSE: BOTH LOCAL GOB OFFICIALS AND LWF CAMP ADMINISTRATORS HOPE THAT OPENING OF NEW REFUGEE CAMP NEAR MOTSETSE (APPROXIMATELY 100 MILES WEST OF FRANCISTOWN ON PAVED ROAD TO NATA) WILL RELIEVE THE UNRELENTING PRESSURE OF INCREASING POPULATIONS AT EXISTING CAMPS. LWF CAMP ADMINISTRATORS AT FRANCISTOWN PLAN TO START TRANSFER OF REFUGEES FROM FRANCISTOWN TO TENT CITY AT MOSETSE AS EARLY AS MID-MAY. GOB HAS GIVEN GREEN LIGHT FOR TRANSFER BUT STILL PREFERS TO REFER TO MOSETSE AS NEW TRANSIT CAMP TO ACCOMMODATE OVERFLOW FROM EXISTING CAMPS. UNHCR PROPOSAL TO USE MOSETSE AREA AS AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT FOR ZIMBABWEAN REFUGEES IS REPORTEDLY STILL UNDER DISCUSSION WITHIN GOB.

7. SITHOLE SUPPORTERS GO HOME: SITHOLE SUPPORTERS WHO HAD BEEN STRANDED AT SELEBI-PIKWE FOR MORE THAN A YEAR WERE RECENTLY REPATRIATED TO RHODESIA. ACCORDING TO ZANU (SITHOLE) REP AT FRANCISTOWN, REPATRIATION WAS ARRANGED THROUGH CONTACTS BETWEEN SALISBURY EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND GOB. BOTSWANA POLICE TRUCKED SITHOLE SUPPORTERS TO BORDER WHERE THEY WERE MET BY RHODESIAN POLICE WHO FACILITATED THEIR ENTRY. SOME SIXTY SUPPORTERS OF BISHOP MUZOREWA REMAIN STRANDED IN SELEBI3 LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PIKWE CAMP, AND NO PLANS HAVE YET BEEN MADE FOR THEIR REPATRIATION.

8. NKOMO VISIT: JOSHUA NKOMO VISITED BOTH CAMPS MAY 8 WHERE HE REPORTEDLY ENCOURAGED HIS FOLLOWERS TO PERSEVERE IN THE STRUGGLE DESPITE THEIR CURRENT HARDSHIPS. REFUGEES IN BOTH CAMPS GREETED NKOMO WITH SONGS AND DEMONSTRATIONS, ALTHOUGH THEY WERE RESTRAINED FROM ANY DISORDER BY BDF.

9. COMMENT: EXISTING ARRANGEMENTS FOR ZIMBABWEAN REFUGEE RELIEF IN BOTSWANA ARE QUICKLY BEING OVERWHELMED BY SHEET WEIGHT OF NUMBERS. UNHCR AND GOB CAN PROBABLY COPE WITH CURRENT INFILUX OF REFUGEES THROUGH SOUTHERN AFRICAN WINTER, PARTICULARLY AS GOB IS NOW PREPARED TO PERMIT TRANSFER OF REFUGEES TO MOSETSE SITE. SOME RELIEF WOULD ALSO BE PROVIDED WERE FLIGHTS TO ZAMBIA RENEWED, ALTHOUGH ZAMBIAN WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT REFUGEES ALREADY APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN STRETCHED TO BREAKING POINT. CURRENT PROBLEMS COULD, HOWEVER, BUILD TO CRISIS PROPORTIONS BY LAST QUARTER OF 1978 WHEN AS MANY AS 20,000 ZIMBABWEAN REFUGEES MAY HAVE TO BE ACCOMMODATED DURING RAINY SEASON. USG AND OTHER DONORS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY RECEIVE UNHCR AND GOB APPEALS FOR RENEWED LARGE-SCALE REFUGEE ASSISTANCE.

10. THE ONLY BRIGHT SPOT IN THIS DISMAL PICTURE IS REPATRIATION OF LONG-SUFFERING SITHOLE SUPPORTERS WHICH ONLY BECAME POSSIBLE AFTER INTERNAL SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT WAS REACHED. WE BELIEVE REPATRIATION OF THE FEW MUZOREWA SUPPORTERS STILL AT SELEBI-PIKWE WILL ALSO BE ARRANGED, ALTHOUGH THEIR INTERNMENT MAY CONTINUE A FEW MORE MONTHS. MOREOVER, DIREC REPATRIATION TO RHODESIA COULD ULTIMATELY BECOME ATTRACTIVE TO SOME NKOMO SUPPORTERS IN CAMPS, PARTICULARLY IF THEY BECOME STRANDED BECAUSE OF ZAPU INABILITY OR UNWILLINGNESS TO ARRANGE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FOR TRANSPORTATION TO ZAMBIA. MUCH WILL DEPEND, OF COURSE, ON THE ABILITY OF THE SALISBURY EXECUTIVE COUNCIL TO CREATE A FAVORABLE CLIMATE FOR REPATRIATION BY AVOIDING REPRISALS AGAINST ANY REFUGEES WHO MIGHT DECIDE TO RETURN FROM BOTSWANA. FOR ITS PART, GOB WOULD PROBABLY WELCOME AND FACILITATE RETURN TO RHODESIA OF ANY REFUGEE WHO VOLUNTARILY CHOSE TO GO HOME. NKOMO'S VISIT TO CAMPS, WHICH HE HAD NEVER BEFORE SEEN, MAY HAVE BEEN MOTIVATED BY DESIRE TO SHORE UP MORALE AND HEAD OFF ANY SENTIMENT FOR REPATRIATION AMONG HIS ADHERENTS IN BOTSWANA.
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